

Sunday September 24, 2023
Lesson 4: How to Host a Dinner Party
Scripture: Luke 14: 7-15

Context:

Today we continue our fall curriculum, “God Provides.” This first unit is titled “Food,” with several lessons of how God’s providence is in the physical refreshments we receive. Today’s final lesson in this unit comes from the book of Luke, one of the gospels to tell of the good news of Jesus and stories of the table he opened to all. The focus of today’s lesson will be to discover the meaning of everyday humility and generosity according to Jesus.

Today’s lesson focuses on one of the many parables Jesus uses to make points about the kingdom of God and how he invites us to see our place at Jesus’ table. The lesson is set amidst Jesus attending a dinner at the home of a Pharisee. While there, Jesus observes the social behavior of both guests and hosts, leading him to make character statements and turn the situation into a teaching lesson.¹ Beginning in verse 7, he states what follows is a parable, a clue to the reader that more than etiquette is involved, just as more than sowing was involved in the previous parable of the sower (8:4-8).² The focus of this parable will be on humility, ego, and pride.

Firstly, Jesus has noted how several individuals have clamored for the most important seats at the event. He turns the event a little by discussing a wedding feast where individuals have gone to sit in places of honor, leading to embarrassment as these seats are for certain guests such as the elderly, specific relatives, or friends. Yet Jesus is serious as this is not a way to offer a divinely approved way for a person to get what he or she wants; taking the low seat is not a way to move up to another.³ Instead, humility is to be practiced and the individual is to realize how they are a guest and not the main event.

Jesus shifts after the parable to the real counsel offered to the host of the dinner. He gives the instruction for when a luncheon or dinner is given, the host is not to focus on friends, brothers and sisters, relatives, or rich neighbors. This is not to say Jesus is not for these groups gathering. Jesus is illuminating how hosting a party can be an act by which one person gains power over others and puts them in their debt.⁴ Jesus is making a bigger point about the kingdom of God. For if God is the host of a dinner party, who can repay God?

What Jesus suggests here is faithful people consider how they treat others. Jesus is not calling Christians to just provide for needs of the poor and disabled; he says invite them to

¹ Fred B. Craddock, “Luke,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 176.

² Ibid., 177.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

dinner.⁵ It is as people eat together, they realize they are equal, and God cements the Christian community as united and not divided by class and social barriers.

Application

The odds are if you grew up in the South or any place with certain customs, you learned about table etiquette and hospitality. Not a week goes by where I do not check in with my mother, a cousin, or a trusted friend to make sure I am following proper etiquette when it comes to traditions, parties, or other social events. Table etiquette extends beyond the dining room to all facets of life.

Jesus tells us as much when he makes some astute observations about a dinner party. The first starts off with party behavior dynamics to the more important lesson of humility. What you do at a dinner party is usually a good indication of how you move through life.

I've recently thought of the people who are important to my life and perhaps some of my favorites are the humblest individuals you will ever meet. When it comes to their gifts and graces, they are confident yet do not talk about themselves constantly. The ones who are clergy never discuss what appointments they think they should serve, yet they go where they are sent and give it their best. The ones who are laity are so willing to learn and never presume anything about anyone. They go through this life doing their best and loving all those they meet.

As I think of dinner parties, these are the people I want at my table. They show me what it means to follow Jesus and how to bring others to the table as well. My prayer is all those who read this commentary can begin to think of the humble people they know and will hopefully share with them the thanksgiving they have for their presence in their lives. Humble people inspire us because they are not filled with themselves as they are filled with goodness and care for others. They are always rooting for others and always have a positive word which draws others to them.

The second lesson Jesus teaches us about in this lesson is the gift of generosity. The host of the feast can provide food for multiple groups of people, yet Jesus wants them to try something a little different. Instead of focusing on people they know who will reward them with an invitation, they want them to focus on sharing their invitations with those who may not be able to return the favor.

For me, this brings up conversations of when we do ministry, what are we seeking to truly do. I recently saw an elder in another denomination talk about demanding expectations of people when their church serves them, and I couldn't help but wonder: is this a true sharing of generosity? As Jesus talks about inviting those to the table, he is very explicit of how this invitation is not about our glory or about us feeling better about ourselves. Sharing in generosity is using the gifts given to us and responding back without expecting anything in return. Generosity is about what God does through us and not about us making new members or picking up on the poor etiquette of others. God is more focused on us doing what we have been called to do rather than how others respond. God wants to create disciples who are generous and who see how their resources are blessings from God which are meant to be shared.

At the end of Jesus' lesson, we see someone gets the message. "Blessed is the one who

⁵ Ibid., 178.

will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” The takeaway of this statement is how table manners of humility and generosity are also rules for the kingdom of God. There are plenty of arrogant and self-promoting people we can have at our dinner parties. We might even think we need them because of the societal pressures of the day.

Yet might we read this passage and be reminded of how Jesus’ kingdom rules are about humility and generosity. These are the people who show us the face of our Lord and as we watch these people, hopefully we too are inspired to be better disciples. May we see Jesus has given us an invitation and all are welcome at his table.

Who are the humblest people you know and what makes them so humble? Who are the most generous people you know and how do their no-strings attached mentality does good for the church or the community? Why do you think Jesus stresses humility and generosity as part of good table manners? What are ways you can challenge yourself to be humbler and more generous? How can the church model generosity for the world today?

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